Northern research has a mixed history. No region of Canada has given as much to the pursuit of knowledge, while having so little invested in its lands and people. After forty years of political development, the old power imbalances between researcher and researched are being corrected. Researchers can no longer conduct their work while overlooking and marginalizing Indigenous peoples, their lands, and experiences. A new era of Northern research is emerging—one that recognizes the need for a diversity of perspectives and approaches to develop public policy in Northern Canada that meet the needs and priorities of Northerners.

One of the Indigenous rights movement’s many aims has been to empower Indigenous peoples and to challenge the paternalistic practices that have informed so much Northern research. Political development, including the negotiation and implementation of comprehensive land claims and self-government agreements in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Northern Quebec, and Labrador, has fundamentally transformed the relationship between Indigenous people, the Canadian state, and its agents. Meanwhile, the devolution of authority over lands and resources provides Indigenous and non-Indigenous Northerners with an eco-
nom ic base for important civic institutions. North-
erners must no longer endure the indignity of having
decisions made for them by people who know little of
their lived experiences or decision-making prac-
tices.

Research has been an important site of this re-
balancing. New institutions—such as the territorial
research institutes—have developed to facilitate pos-
itive relationships between communities and re-
searchers and to prevent exploitative research. But it
takes time to heal old wounds and to forge new rela-
tionships. Past mistakes can serve as barriers to the
future, and it is unfortunate that the constructive use
of knowledge in the public interest can be over-
looked.

A recent example illustrates this point. This past
May, the Hon. Leona Aglukkaq criticized the United
Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food,
Olivier De Schutter. She drew upon the uneasy rela-
tionship of Northerners with research, stating:

How dare he come to Canada to study us, once
again from afar, and declare what is best for us
as Inuit in our country…What this amounts to
is an academic study of Aboriginal people in
Canada’s Arctic without ever setting foot on our
grounds, walking in our footsteps and under-
standing some of the limitations as well as the in-
credible opportunities we have as Aboriginal peo-
ple in this country.

Her words resonated with many Northerners. The
promise of political development, however, cannot
be met without sustained attention to the vital role
that knowledge and research play in the formation
of public policy. The colonial roots of research
should not be forgotten, but nor should research be
abandoned. The Min-
ister’s words do not re-

The promise of political development, however, cannot be met
without sustained attention to the vital role that knowledge and
research play in the formation of public policy. The colonial roots
of research should not be forgotten, but nor should research be
abandoned...Direction is increasingly set by Indigenous and non-
Indigenous Northerners who need first-rate, independent, policy-relevant research to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of their
new governance regimes.

In November 2011, a group of researchers, policy
makers and civil society organizations from across
Northern Canada met in Yellowknife to discuss the
outcomes of ongoing research on the Northern social
economic. Questions about how to effectively com-
municate the policy-relevance of that research led to the creation of *Northern Public Affairs*.

Published three times a year, *Northern Public Affairs* is the first of its kind in Northern Canada. We hope

**Our first issue reflects the passion for the place Northerners call home. It covers the gamut—from foreign affairs to education, governance to the arts. Our contributors are premiers, public servants, artists, and students. We hope you can join them as we question, debate, and discuss the issues facing Northerners and Canadians. It’s time for a new conversation.**

*Northern Public Affairs* creates a space for debate and the exchange of ideas about issues facing Northerners. By drawing on the wealth of knowledge, research capacity, and informed opinion that already exists in Northern Canada and across the country, we hope to engage Northerners in a new conversation.

The magazine is a partnership between Northern and southern institutions, and represents another attempt to rebalance the relationship between Northerners and researchers. We are grateful for the support of our partners and volunteers who have made this first issue possible. Without the voluntary contributions of our authors, advisers, copy editors, and curators, it would not be possible to produce this publication. Now, and in the future, the success of this project will depend on the interest and engagement of people from across Canada.

Our website is an extension of the magazine and another space for commentary and debate. Our blog features a number of regular contributors, including correspondents from each of the three territories, as well as overseas. We welcome guest contributors with special expertise in all areas, and post regular news items and announcements to help our readers stay informed about important policy matters. We are committed to growth and innovation, and welcome new ideas, articles, and special features.

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